

PHYSICAL CONTACT BETWEEN STAFF AND PUPILS INCORPORATING SAFE TOUCH POLICY

DATE OF REVIEW: Autumn 2024

DATE OF NEXT REVIEW : Autumn 2026

TO BE REVIEWED BY: Resources Committee



Rationale

This policy is designed to ensure that all adults in school understand when physical contact might be appropriate or necessary. It is designed to safeguard and protect children and to protect school staff from allegations of mis-use of touch.

The quality of the child's relationships with significant adults is key to their healthy development and emotional health and wellbeing. Touch is recognised as being a physical way of soothing, calming and containing distress. Many research studies have indicated the necessity of human contact and touch in the healthy development of children. It is a factor in children who experience neglect and 'fail to thrive'. It is not illegal to touch a pupil. There are occasions when physical contact with a pupil is proper and necessary.

Examples of where touching a pupil might be proper or necessary:

- Holding the hand of the child at the front/back of the line when going to assembly
- When comforting a distressed pupil;
- When a pupil is being congratulated or praised;
- To demonstrate how to use a musical instrument;
- To demonstrate exercises or techniques during PE lessons or sports coaching;
- To give first aid.

Considerations

In all situations when physical contact between staff and pupils takes place, staff must consider the following:

- The pupil's age and level of understanding as to why physical contact is made
- The pupil's individual characteristics (e.g. whether the physical contact might be misinterpreted or resented, this includes issues of the relative gender of staff and pupil)
- The location where the contact takes place (e.g. it should not take place in private without other witnesses present)
- It should not become an habitual act between a particular staff member and an individual pupil
- Physical contact should never be made as a punishment or in order to inflict pain
- All forms of corporate punishment are prohibited
- Physical contact should not be made with either participant's neck, breasts; abdomen, genital area, other sensitive body parts, or to put pressure on joints
- Should physical contact between staff and pupils lead to an injury suffered by either party, a written report must be completed as soon as possible.

Safe Touch

Our policy on Safe Touch takes into account the neurobiological research and other studies relating to attachment theory and child development that identify safe touch as a positive contribution to brain development, emotional regulation, mental health and the development of prosocial skills. It is an integral part of our work to support children's social and emotional development.

If 'safe touch' is to be used, it must be done with the full knowledge and consent of parents/carers, by trained and supervised staff in carefully monitored situations where its therapeutic use has been agreed because it addresses an identified developmental need on the part of the child.

The use of 'safe touch' by designated adults needs to be supervised, monitored and reviewed on a regular basis, as indeed does the policy, to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of children, parents/carers and staff.

Safe touch may be used to

- Calm a distressed child
- Contain an angry child
- Encourage/affirm an anxious child
- To support a child with low self-esteem.

Other means of calm, soothing and containing children's strong emotions include:

- Slowing one's pace
- Lowering the voice

Ways or regulating children's emotions

- Breathing more deeply
- Initially matching the pitch and volume of the child's emotional display (shout, cry etc) and then regulating it down
- Talking slowly firmly and quietly in an unhurried unflustered way
- Providing clear predictable consistently held boundaries.

Moreover, gentle safe holding is appropriate if a child:

- Is hurting himself/herself or others (or is likely to hurt himself/herself and/or others) or
- Is damaging property, and/or
- Is incensed and out of control, so that all verbal attempts to engage him/her have failed.

Such necessary interventions are fully in line with guidelines set out in the Government Document 'Use of Reasonable Force' (2013)

Guidelines for the use of Safe Touch

To ensure touch is only used appropriately the following guidelines are to be followed:

- Parents/carers should be informed of the school policy on Touch
- Teachers/support staff should be trained in all aspects of safe touch
- Staff members should agree the use of safe touch in discussion
- 2 adult rule. No adult should use safe holding when alone with a child.

Where touch is used, it should be brief, gentle contact on open clothed parts of the body: hands, arms, shoulders, head, hair, shoes. At no point and under no circumstances should staff members use touch to satisfy their own need for physical contact or reassurance.

Inappropriate touch will be deemed as the most serious breach of the Code of Ethics warranting the highest level of disciplinary action.

Who can use reasonable force?

- All members of school staff have a legal power to use reasonable force.
- This power applies to any member of staff at the school. It can also apply to people whom the headteacher has temporarily put in charge of pupils such as unpaid volunteers or parents accompanying students on a school organised visit.

When can reasonable force be used?

- Reasonable force can be used to prevent pupils from hurting themselves or others, from damaging property, or from causing disorder.
- In a school, force is used for two main purposes – to control pupils or to restrain them.
- The decision on whether or not to physically intervene is down to the professional judgement of the staff member concerned and should always depend on the individual circumstances.

Physical Restraint

Physical restraint of pupils should only be used to avert an immediate danger to:

- (a) the pupil
- (b) other children or adults
- (c) the property of any person

In accordance with the DfE Guidance 'Use of Reasonable Force' Schools can use reasonable force to:

- remove disruptive children from the classroom where they have refused to follow an instruction to do so;
- prevent a pupil behaving in a way that disrupts a school event or a school trip or visit;
- prevent a pupil leaving the classroom where allowing the pupil to leave would risk their safety or lead to behaviour that disrupts the behaviour of others;
- prevent a pupil from attacking a member of staff or another pupil, or to stop a fight in the playground; and
- restrain a pupil at risk of harming themselves through physical outbursts.

When physical restraint is necessary staff will make every effort to ensure that another member of staff is called. If this is not possible, then another adult should be called. A sensible child may be sent for help if necessary. All incidents of physical restraint will be recorded and parents informed.

Linked Policies

This policy should be read in conjunction with other school policies, in particular

- Health and Safety Policy
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Positive Behaviour Policy
- Intimate Care Policy.

Complaints

Any complaints about physical contact should be dealt with using the school's complaints procedure. In cases of serious allegations, the Child Protection Procedure should be used.

Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed as necessary and at least every two years by the Governing Body.

PHYSICAL CONTACT BETWEEN STAFF AND PUPILS

DO

- Know the school policy and other related policy documents
- Discuss with a senior member of staff if you are unsure about any aspects of the policy
- Be aware of pupils' individual characteristics
- Assess the situation before acting
- Stay calm and do not overreact
- Remember that you have an obligation to safeguard the welfare of pupils in your care
- Consult your Professional Association or Trade Union if you have any concerns
- Report concerns over physical contact between other staff and pupils to your line manager, the Headteacher or Deputy Headteacher
- Record any serious incidents in the appropriate format as soon as possible

DON'T

- Place yourself at risk through your actions
- Act in anger
- Have physical contact with a pupil in a private situation
- Have frequent physical contact with the same pupil
- Allow situations to get out of control